

Message Text

SECRET

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42

ACTION PM-03

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6807

INFO AMEMBASSY MASERU

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

S E C R E T GABORONE 0961

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: XGDS IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE

TAGS: PINS, BC

SUBJECT: BOTSWANA REQUEST FOR BOMB DISPOSAL TRAINING

1. P. L. STEENKAMP, PERMANENT SECRETARY TO PRESIDENT SIR SERETSE KHAMA, HAS WRITTEN TO ME ABOUT U.S. TRAINING FOR SOME MEMBERS OF THE BOTSWANA POLICE IN THE BOMB DISPOSAL FIELD. GOB DESIRES TO KNOW WHETHER IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO RECRUIT AN EXPERT FROM THE UNITED STATES TO TRAIN OFFICERS IN BOTSWANA OR SEND OFFICERS TO THE UNITED STATES FOR SUCH TRAINING.

2. IN A FOLLOW-UP CONVERSATION ON JULY 17, STEENKAMP TOLD ME THERE HAD BEEN A NUMBER OF BOMB EXPLOSIONS IN BOTSWANA OVER THE YEARS AND THAT THE GOB MUST DEVELOP A CAPABILITY TO DETECT AND DEFUSE BOMBS. STEENKAMP NOTED THAT AN EAST AFRICAN AIRWAYS AIRCRAFT WAS BLOWN UP IN FRANCISTOWN IN 1964. IN 1965 A REFUGEE HOSTEL WAS BLOWN UP. ABRAHAM ONKGOPOTSE TIRO, PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS MOVEMENT, WAS KILLED IN A PARCEL BOMB EXPLOSION IN FEBRUARY 1974. ON TUESDAY, JULY 15, 1975, TWO ZANU REFUGEES WERE BLOWN UP BY BOMBS 17 MILES NORTH OF FRANCISTOWN. STEENKAMP SAID THE GOB HAD A CAPABILITY TO DETECT

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LETTER BOMBS BUT NO ONE TO DEFUSE SUCH BOMBS. HE EXPRESSED

THE VIEW THAT THE PRESENCE OF BOMBS IN BOTSWANA WOULD PROBABLY INCREASE AS NEITHER THE RHODESIAN NOR BOTSWANA AUTHORITIES HAD THE CAPABILITY TO PREVENT FREEDOM FIGHTERS FROM CROSSING THEIR BORDER.

3. STEENKAMP SAID THE GOB WANTED FOUR OFFICERS TRAINED. THEY HAVE DONE SOME APTITUDE TESTING AND IDENTIFIED OFFICERS WHO COULD PROFIT FROM TRAINING IN THE BOMB DISPOSAL FIELD. HE NOTED THAT A U.K. EXPERT (BYRD) HAD BEEN IN BOTSWANA FOR GENERAL POLICE TRAINING. BYRD HAD SOME KNOWLEDGE OF BOMB DISPOSAL; HE WAS UNSATISFACTORY IN TRAINING PEOPLE. STEENKAMP SAID THE BRITISH HAD SUGGESTED THAT BOTSWANA APPROACH A COMMERCIAL FIRM; THE GOB DID NOT WANT TO APPROACH SUCH FIRM.

4. STEENKAMP TOLD ME THE GOB WOULD BE PREPARED TO FINANCE A REASONABLE COST FOR A PERSON TO CONDUCT TRAINING IN BOTSWANA OR SEND FOUR OFFICERS TO THE UNITED STATES. THE GOB WOULD PREFER THAT THE TRAINING BE CONDUCTED IN BOTSWANA. STEENKAMP THOUGHT THE GOB WOULD NOT BE ADVERSE TO A USG-FINANCED MILITARY TRAINING OFFICER (IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES) BUT APPRECIATED THE DIFFICULTIES THAT MAY BE INVOLVED.

5. COMMENT: IN CONSIDERING THE BOTSWANA REQUEST THE FOLLOWING

FACTORS IN RELATION TO UNITED STATES POLICY INTERESTS SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND:

A. THIS IS BASICALLY A HUMANITARIAN REQUEST TO INCREASE THE CAPABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT ITSELF AND ITS PEOPLE. A BOMB DISPOSAL CAPABILITY IN BOTSWANA COULD BECOME IMPORTANT TO THE PROTECTION OF AMERICAN LIVES AND PROPERTY, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW POSSIBLE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

B. SUCH A CAPABILITY INCREASES BOTSWANA'S DETERRENT CREDIBILITY TO REDUCE PRESSURES FOR THE USE OF ITS TERRITORY BY RADICAL OR SUBVERSIVE GROUPS. IF, FOR EXAMPLE, INSURGENTS WERE TO CONSIDER TRYING TO DESTROY THE OQTZSIAN RAILWAY IN BOTSWANA TERRITORY, A BOMB DISPOSAL CAPABILITY WOULD INCREASE GOB CREDIBILITY IN OPPOSING SUCH AN EFFORT.

C. GIVEN BOTSWANA'S PUBLIC DENUNCIATION OF IDI AMIN AND REFUSAL
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TO ATTEND THE OAU SUMMIT CONFERENCE IN KAMPALA, POSSIBLE RETALIATION BY AMIN IS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS, MEMBERS OF THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS STAFF HAVE INDICATED DIRECTLY THAT THEY HAVE SOME CONCERN ABOUT THIS POSSIBILITY.

D. PRESIDENT KHAMA HAS EXPRESSED PUBLICLY (MAHALAPYE SPEECH OF MARCH 28) AND IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH ME HIS

CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE EFFORTS BY DISSIDENT NATIONALISTS AGAINST HIM OR THE GOVERNMENT.O

E. GIVEN THE REAL CONCERNS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BOTSWANA, WE MUST EXPECT EFFORTS TO OBTAIN THIS TRAINING FROM OTHER SOURCES IF NECESSARY. GOB MAY HAVE APPROACHED THE BRITISH ALREADY AND IN ANY CASE IT IS NOT IMPRESSED WITH BRITISH TRAINING CAPABILITY IN THIS FIELD. THERE ARE OTHER OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE GOB WHICH ARE LESS APPEALING IN TERM S OF THE U.S. NATIONAL INTEREST, INCLUDING THE ANC AND FRELIMO, WHO HAVE HAD SOME EXPERIENCE OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS AND MIGHT ALSO HAVE ACCESS TO BLOC SPECIALISTS. THE OTHER MAJOR ALTERNATIVE IS THE BLOC COUNTIRES THEMSELVES, PARTICULARLY CHINA, WHICH HAS A NEWLY ESTABLISHED EMBASSY IN GOBORONE.

F. U.S. ASSISTANCE WOULD GIVE US IMPROVED ACCESS TO AN IMPORTANT INTEREST GROUP AND CONTRIBUTE TO STRENGTHENING OUR OVERALL BILATERAL RELATIONS.

6. FOR THE FOREGOING REASONS, I RECOMMEND THAT WE ASSIST THE GOVERNMENT OF BOTSWANA IN RECRUITING A BOMB DISPOSAL EXPERT OR OTHERWISE ASSIST IN PROVIDING SUCH TRAINING.
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